

or as one."

much. But I'd already been doing this. Bonnie and *MT* and say, "How dare you?" *2/25/04*

BOLDFACE NAMES/Joyce Wadler

It Must Have Been The Language Barrier

"It's a very, very great honor to be a last-minute replacement," **BILL MURRAY** said in his signature deadpan at the 56th Annual Writers Guild of America Awards in New York.

"And when all those little people did not answer their phones, I knew it was my time."

Then a nod to the president of the Writers Guild of America, East: "But I wanted to thank **HERB SARGENT** for asking me, because I needed an excuse not to go to California."

Forget the mysterious mug of the **MONA LISA**. Our task here at Boldface is to plumb the depths of the celebrity psyche, and so to Mr. Murray's deadpan. Is he being ironic? Is he hiding behind a mask of studied inexpressiveness?

Is he thinking, heck, it got me an Academy Award nomination for best actor in "Lost in Translation" and I'm sticking with a winner?

But to the awards, held simultaneously in New York and Los Angeles on Saturday night.

KURT VONNEGUT JR. presented **JULES FEIFFER** with a Lifetime Achievement Award. **DAN RATHER** presented an

award to **JOHN McCAIN** for calling on Congress to scrutinize media conglomerates.

When the awards ceremony was over, Mr. Murray hung around for a while and posed good-naturedly for pictures with people he didn't know.

Offstage, he seemed shy.

Had he had a good time this evening?

"I had a fine time," he said taciturnly, before being surrounded by fans.

JUDAH FRIEDLANDER, who is in "American Splendor," came over, as did Mr. Sargent.

The talk turned to the early days of "Saturday Night Live," which made Mr. Murray a star.

"He was there when it was outstanding, remember?" Mr. Murray said of Mr. Sargent, who had been a writer for the show.

"When it was innovative," Mr. Friedlander said.

We took another shot at speaking with Mr. Murray. He told us he had been moved by the emotion between Mr. Rather and Senator McCain, that he was impressed as well by the senator's work.

On to show biz: Is Mr. Murray looking forward to the Oscars?

"I'm going to have fun," he said. Is he going to hit the parties?

"No," he said softly and made a slight grimace.

You don't do any of that? We thought our tone was playful, but perhaps something was lost in translation.

"You're putting words in my mouth," Mr. Murray said. "You asked me a question. I said no. And then you tell me something else. Wonderful."

We wished him well at the Academy Awards and went home.

We Hope He Didn't Try That With the Anchor

The mood was mellow at a club called Smoke, near 106th Street and Broadway, where **WYNTON MARSALIS** and his quartet performed some numbers from his new CD, "The Magic Hour," on Monday night.

KEN BURNS, the filmmaker who made a 17½-hour homage to jazz, arrived early. The NBC anchor **TOM BROKAW** stood at the back of the bar, moving in time to the music.

Mr. Marsalis, dressed in a charcoal gray Brooks Brothers suit, smiled and shook hands as he made

his way to the stage. He has a baby face and looks a decade younger than his 42 years. As he and his musicians played, he danced or called out encouragement.

"Hold on to your own low voice," we heard him tell the bass player.

Later, we asked him about that.

"When we're playing, it's just like we talk to each other like you're in church," he said. "You know. It's part of the tradition of the music. They play a groove. I say I like that, or you better watch out, or look out now. It's called co-signing."

How does he unwind after a concert?

A charming, sly smile. "We have our ways."

We noticed Mr. Marsalis making his way down the bar. He stopped at a pretty young woman, leaned in like he was smelling a rose, and brushed his lips against her neck.

You like the pretty girls, we told him.

Mr. Marsalis leaned in closely. "I don't like them," he said.

He put his lips closer to our ear. "I love them." His lips brushed the reporter's neck. Then he was out the door.

with Paula Schwartz